

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. A method of managing user information in an instant messaging ("IM") system,
2 comprising steps of:
3 determining, for an IM client, whether users remembered by the IM client should be
4 treated as expired; and
5 omitting those users which are to be treated as expired when performing selected IM
6 management functions.
- 1 2. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the omitting step omits the users when
2 performing presence determination.
- 1 3. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of using expiration criteria selected by a user of the IM client.
- 1 4. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of comparing a first date when an instant message last arrived from a particular user to a second
3 date selected by a user of the IM client.
- 1 5. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of determining whether an instant message last arrived from a particular user more than a
3 specified length of time before a current time.

1 6. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of comparing a first date when an instant message was last sent by a user of the IM client to a
3 particular user to a second date selected by the IM client user.

1 7. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of determining whether an instant message was last sent by a user of the IM client user to a
3 particular user more than a specified length of time before a current time.

1 8. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step further comprises the step
2 of selecting, by a user of the IM client, one or more users that will then be automatically treated
3 as currently expired.

1 9. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step is performed by analyzing
2 expiration information for each presently-unexpired user upon occurrence of a configured
3 interval.

1 10. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining and omitting steps are also
2 performed for user groups remembered by the IM client.

1 11. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the determining step uses default expiration
2 criteria and further comprising the step of enabling a user of the IM client to selectively override
3 the default expiration criteria.

1 12. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
2 receiving an inbound message from a particular user who is being treated as expired; and
3 automatically treating the particular user as no longer expired, responsive to the receiving
4 step.

1 13. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
2 sending an outbound message from the IM client to a particular user who is being treated
3 as expired; and
4 automatically treating the particular user as no longer expired, responsive to the sending
5 step.

1 14. The method according to Claim 1, further comprising the step of using a distinct visual
2 indicator for those users who are being treated as expired when presenting those users' names on
3 a display to a user of the IM client.

1 15. The method according to Claim 1, wherein the users remembered by the IM client are
2 those users having entries in an address book used by the IM client.

1 16. A method of managing user information in an instant messaging ("IM") system,
2 comprising steps of:
3 evaluating, for an IM client, which of the users remembered by the IM client should be

4 treated as expired;

5 providing, for the IM client, an indication for those users which are to be treated as
6 expired; and

7 charging a fee for carrying out the evaluating and providing steps.

1 17. A method of managing user information in an instant messaging ("IM") system,
2 comprising steps of:

3 determining, for an IM client, whether users remembered by the IM client should be
4 treated as expired; and

5 providing a different visual representation for the remembered users who are to be treated
6 as expired, as contrasted to the remembered users who are not to be treated as expired, when
7 displaying an IM client display to a user of the IM client.

1 18. The method according to Claim 17, wherein the different visual representation comprises
2 using an italicized font when displaying names or nicknames of the remembered users who are to
3 be treated as expired, as contrasted to a non-italicized font used when displaying names or
4 nicknames of the remembered users who are not to be treated as expired.

1 19. The method according to Claim 17, wherein the different visual representation comprises
2 automatically moving, to a selected location that is distinct from the IM client display, the names
3 or nicknames of the remembered users who are to be treated as expired when displaying the IM
4 client display to the IM client user.

1 20. A system for managing user information in an instant messaging ("IM") system,
2 comprising:
3 an IM client;
4 means for determining, for the IM client, whether users remembered by the IM client
5 should be treated as expired; and
6 means for omitting those users which are to be treated as expired when performing
7 selected IM management functions.

1 21. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for omitting omits the users when
2 performing presence determination.

1 22. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining further comprises
2 means for comparing a first date when an instant message last arrived from a particular user to a
3 second date selected by a user of the IM client.

1 23. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining further comprises
2 means for determining whether an instant message last arrived from a particular user more than a
3 specified length of time before a current time.

1 24. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining further comprises
2 means for selecting, by a user of the IM client, one or more users that will then be automatically

3 treated as currently expired.

1 25. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining is performed upon
2 occurrence of a scheduled action that analyzes expiration information for each presently-
3 unexpired user.

1 26. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the means for determining and means for
2 omitting are also performed for user groups remembered by the IM client.

1 27. The system according to Claim 20, further comprising:
2 means for receiving an inbound message from a particular user who is being treated as
3 expired; and
4 means for automatically treating the particular user as no longer expired, responsive to the
5 means for receiving.

1 28. The system according to Claim 20, further comprising:
2 means for sending an outbound message from the IM client to a particular user who is
3 being treated as expired; and
4 means for automatically treating the particular user as no longer expired, responsive to the
5 means for sending.

1 29. The system according to Claim 20, further comprising means for using a distinct visual

indicator for those users who are being treated as expired when presenting those users' names on a display to a user of the IM client.

30. The system according to Claim 20, wherein the users remembered by the IM client are those users having entries in an address book used by the IM client.

31. A computer program product for managing user information in an instant messaging ("IM") system, the computer program product embodied on one or more computer-readable media and comprising:

computer-readable program code means for determining, for an IM client, whether users remembered by the IM client should be treated as expired; and

computer-readable program code means for omitting those users which are to be treated as expired when performing selected IM management functions.

32. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable program code means for omitting omits the users when performing presence determination.

33. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable program code means for determining further comprises computer-readable program code means for comparing a first date when an instant message was last sent by a user of the IM client to a particular user to a second date selected by the IM client user.

1 34. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable
2 program code means for determining further comprises computer-readable program code means
3 for determining whether an instant message was last sent by a user of the IM client user to a
4 particular user more than a specified length of time before a current time.

1 35. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable
2 program code means for determining further comprises computer-readable program code means
3 for selecting, by a user of the IM client, one or more users that will then be automatically treated
4 as currently expired.

1 36. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable
2 program code means for determining further comprises:

3 computer-readable program code means for scheduling an expiration action for each of
4 one or more of the remembered users; and

5 computer-readable program code means for treating each of the remembered users as
6 expired upon executing the scheduled expiration action for that remembered user.

1 37. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable
2 program code means for determining and the computer-readable program code means for
3 omitting are also performed for user groups remembered by the IM client.

1 38. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the computer-readable

2 program code means for determining uses default expiration criteria and further comprising
3 computer-readable program code means for enabling a user of the IM client to selectively
4 override the default expiration criteria.

1 39. The computer program product according to Claim 31, further comprising computer-
2 readable program code means for using a distinct visual indicator for those users who are being
3 treated as expired when presenting those users' names on a display to a user of the IM client.

1 40. The computer program product according to Claim 31, wherein the users remembered by
2 the IM client are those users having entries in an address book used by the IM client.